No. 91

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"What have you to say for yourself, you shameless creature!" he hissed as he advanced and seized her by the wrist.
R. of M. G., No. 91.

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IT WAS with a sigh of relief that Hazel hurried from the Attorney's office. While the voice spoke at the other end of the telephone, she had experienced a peculiar sensation around her heart. What the feeling was she could not explain to herself.

When she arrived home she found Mrs. Kingsley awaiting her with an important expression on her face. She followed Hazel to her room and closed the door very carefully.

Chapter 304

BROUGHT TO BAY

ALICE had instructed Jackson to show the detective into the library. A strange feeling of apprehension was taking possession of her as she finished her toilet. What was his object in calling upon her so unexpectedly?

Her mind was far from being tranquil as she swept into the library a few minutes later. After closing the door carefully she advanced into the room with her head raised proudly.

"I am Mrs. Ames. Did you wish to see me, sir?" she asked coldly.

The detective had risen from his chair. Her

haughty demeanor evidently did not make the least impression upon him. He smiled serenely as he fumbled clumsily in his pocket for some papers.

"Sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Ames," he said. "The object of my coming is to get a statement from you regarding the crime for which Larry Coleman was sentenced to life imprisonment. It is concerning the shooting of Earl Cortland, that I wish to ask you a few simple questions."

The detective had come to the point with a direct bluntness which took Alice's breath away.

He caught her completely off her guard. She was so bewildered that she could not utter a word for some moments.

With her face suddenly gone very white, she sank into a chair. Finally she said:

"I cannot understand why you should come to me for a statement. Coleman convicted himself at the trial, which leaves nothing more to be said. I wish to be excused from answering any further questions upon this most unpleasant subject."

Alice spoke rapidly and in a slightly raised tone of voice.

She wanted to convey the impression that she was very much annoyed, very angry; but she made an utter failure of that.

Her every word betrayed the nameless terror and fright, which threatened to stop the beating of her heart.

"That is rather an unsatisfactory answer, Mrs. Amees," the detective went on in the same even tone. "You see the fact of the matter is that Larry Coleman has made a full confession to the warden of the Harrisburg penitentiary.

"In this confession he asserts that he did not fire the shot which killed Earl Cortland. He claims that it

was your finger that pulled the trigger."

For several minutes Alice fought against the black unconsciousness which was beginning to benumb her senses.

She was in a panic. It was with a supreme effort that she regained her power of speech. When at last she spoke, her voice was unnatural and harsh.

"Larry Coleman's own statement under oath was sufficient for twelve men to find him guilty of murder in the first degree," she said with a forced laugh. "If he subsequently has told a different story, it cannot in the least concern me. I hope I have made myself plain in this matter."

"You have made yourself very plain, Mrs. Ames," the detective assured her. "Perhaps you are not aware of the fact that the State of Pennsylvania claims the right to re-open any case in which a criminal has been condemned, if there is sufficient new evidence brought out to warrant it."

"May I ask you one question," Alice interposed. "If Coleman made this confession, as you state, did he mention any reason why he allowed himself to be condemned and assume the punishment for the crime if he did not commit it?"

The eyes of the detective were glued to Alice's face as he replied:

"Larry Coleman claims that he acted as he did because he was desperately in love with you at the time. His infatuation for you cooled suddenly when he became convinced that you had used him as a tool to remove Cortland.

"In his confession he makes himself very plain on that point. He says that you had some hidden motive for hating Earl Cortland, and that you feared him."

Again Alice laughed harshly.

"I am afraid Coleman has allowed his imagination to run away with him," she cried. "Why should I hate Earl Cortland since I had only met him twice before the shooting. He was an absolute stranger to me until he was introduced to me by my husband."

"You are quite sure you never met Cortland before that?" the detective asked quietly, his keen eyes meeting hers unflinchingly.

The penetrating glance of the detective, as well as his manner of speech, was disconcerting to Alice. Her voice trembled as she said:

"Did Coleman assert perhaps that I had met Cortland before?"

The man nodded his head, while a shrewd smile crossed his face.

"You have guessed correctly, Mrs. Ames," he conceded. "Larry Coleman did make such a statement, in fact he claims to know why you were anxious to have Cortland removed. I believe it had something to do with a certain period of your past."

"Why, the idea is absurd—preposterous!" Alice flamed. "That man must be mad to make such an assertion as that."

"Then you insist that you never met Cortland previous to his coming to the Ames villa," the detective said calmly, measuring her from head to foot with a penetrating glance.

"I do insist, and I hope this will satisfy you," she answered impatiently. "If you have finished asking me questions, I shall declare this interview at an end."

She had risen from her seat and began to pace the floor excitedly.

If she expected to see the detective rise also and take his departure, she was to be disappointed. He remained seated. His manner was imperturbable.

"I am not quite through, Mrs. Ames," he said very quietly. "There are a number of other things which I thought might interest you. The many papers and letters left behind by Cortland were thoroughly examined by the authorities.

"They have made the discovery that the name of Earl Cortland was an assumed name. It seems that this man has been masquerading under several aliases. At one time he called himself George Ballard. Have you, in your travels, perhaps had the pleasure of meeting a man by that name, Mrs. Ames?"

Alice was dumb with terror. She shook her head slowly, as she declared that she had never met George Ballard.

"Your memory has apparently left you," the detective went on in that same even tone. "A recent investigation disclosed the fact that you met this George Ballard while you were staying in Venice with the Ames family."

"I met so many people during our sojourn in Italy, that it would have been next to an impossible task to remember all the names," she replied. "I really have not the least recollection of having met a man by that name. Still I might have met him and forgotten the name."

"That is very likely," he admitted with that same shrewd smile playing about his lips.

He was breaking down Alice's icy reserve by degrees. It was only by an almost superhuman effort that she sat straight in her chair and answered the questions put to her.

"Of course you know that Cora Allen is at present confined in a private sanitarium," the detective continued, attacking her from a different angle.

"It is rather peculiar that she stubbornly clings to the belief that Coleman did not fire the shot which

killed Cortland.

"I had quite a talk with her, and I cannot understand why a girl who appears to be rational, should be kept in a private sanitarium. She is no more insane than I am.

"You know, I have a vague suspicion that she is being forcibly detained there for a purpose. She would be a dangerous person to be at large, especially since she seems to know certain things about the shooting of Cortland."

Alice had started to her feet, her face flaming with anger. She shot the detective a vicious glance as she said:

"Your insinuations are becoming highly offensive, sir. I am not on the witneses stand, and I refuse to submit to further cross examining."

The detective seemed to be quite satisfied to terminate the interview. He rose slowly and walked toward the door.

"It is quite probable that you will be summoned to appear before the prosecuting attorney, Mrs. Ames," he informed her before leaving. "I would suggest that you hold yourself in readiness."

She stood leaning against the table with her face deadly white.

Unable to make a reply, she nodded her head. Her eyes followed him as he left the house, and she did not breathe easy until she saw the detective disappear down the street.

Alice was in a state of feverish excitement. The frightful realization that she had reached the end of her journey made her tremble. All her hopes of the future, which had been built upon the unstable ground of lies and crime, were beginning to totter.

She saw herself standing before the bar, accused

of the murder of Cortland. Her heart turned sick within her at the thought.

Larry Coleman had turned traitor. Her husband, the only man who might have protected her, was gone forever.

There was not a human being in all the whole wide world to whom she could turn in her terrible dilemma.

Her only safety lay in instant flight. The awful suspicion had risen in her bosom that this very moment perhaps she was under constant surveillance.

In her nameless fear she imagined she saw a detective lurking in the shadow of the house.

With the help of her maid Alice packed several trunks.

After gathering all the available ready cash, she informed the servants that she was going to meet Mr. Ames in New York, and that they expected to travel for several weeks together.

In less than an hour the automobile was on its way to the city.

When the midnight express pulled out of the Pennsylvania station, bound for New York, Alice was among its passengers.

She was fleeing the country, and her destination was sunny Italy. In Naples she hoped to meet Russel Sherwood.

Alice did not anticipate any difficulty in finding him. She had spent several months in that city and knew every hotel and pleasure resort.

She felt confident that this handsome young man loved her still. Alice was a woman who knew the power of her magnetic eyes and many physical charms. Russel Sherwood would be at her feet.

Her confidence of success in that direction grew as the voyage across the Atlantic progressed. And she

managed to enjoy the trip a great deal better than she had expected.

There were several male passengers aboard who cast admiring eyes at her. If she gave them a smile it was done without offering much encouragement. She seemed to enjoy holding them at arms' length and play the coquette.

Among the female contigent of first-class passengers was a young woman by the name of June Aldridge. She had been employed as a movie actress at Hollywood.

A nervous breakdown, resulting from overwork, was responsible for her being aboard the steamer. She and Alice struck up an acquaintance and became quite good friends. Every day they could be seen on the promenade deck together.

One day as they stood at the railing, Alice mentioned the fact that she had been in Hollywood, and that she knew quite a few people there.

"Did you happen to know Richard Courtenay?" Miss Aldridge inquired.

"Oh, yes, I knew him very well," replied Alice with a blush. "He is a little too conceited to suit me. He has an idea that every woman he meets must fall in love with him."

"Well, did you?" came the quick question.

"Almost," the other admitted. A moment later she added somewhat abruptly: "But he did not get a chance to make a fool out of me."

"When did you see him last?" June Aldridge wanted to know directly.

Alice thought a minute.

"I believe it was a reception and ball given by Mark Sperber," she declared.

"Oh, were you there?" Miss Aldridge cried. "Then you must have heard about the funny thing that hap-

pened. I am sorry I missed it, for it was all over when I arrived. A roughneck cowgirl forced some Chicago society dame to lace her shoes. They told me it created quite a scene. And it was all about Richard Courtenay."

Alice swallowed hard and turned away. The scene which Miss Aldridge had mentioned, was still fresh in her mind, for she had been one of the principal actors.

"No, I don't think I heard about that," she lied as she raised her arm and waved at a passing steamer. "It must have happened before I came. What was the Chicago woman's name, by the way."

"Mrs. Gordon," was the prompt retort from June Aldridge. "And you remind me a whole lot of her."

"My name is Procter," Alice said stiffly.

"Yes, I know that. But I could almost swear that you and Mrs. Gordon are the same woman."

Miss Aldridge had scarcely finished the sentence when Alice wheeled suddenly and walked away. From that hour on these two were not again seen together.

During the rest of the ocean voyage they hardly spoke to each other. Alice's keen intuition told her that Miss Aldridge had recognized her. And nothing was more distasteful to her than being reminded of a scene in which she had been so terribly humiliated.

Chapter 305

COUNT RAVAIGNAC

THE TABLES were being cleared in the dining salon of the Hotel Bristol. The many guests were scattering in different directions. Some of them went out on the veranda to listen to a Venetian trio of musicians. Others delighted in a drive along the bay, where the cooling breeze made them forget the heat of the day.

Mrs. Talmadge was seated comfortably in a cozy corner of the veranda.

Next to her sat the elder Sherwood, whose interesting narrative of his many travels and experiences held her spellbound.

A little distance away sat young Russel. He gazed absently over the smooth waters of the distant bay with a dreamy expression in his eyes.

His thoughts were of the girl who was missing—Ella Talmadge.

Her mother had announced that she had gone to the music room to indulge in an hour of piano practice.

The ever present Count Ravaignac sat some little distance away, listening to the elder Sherwood's story with a scowl on his face.

It was very evident that there was no love lost between himself and the Sherwoods.

Occasionally he shot young Russel a vicious glance.

"There is a splendid concert at the National Park to-night," Mr. Sherwood was saying. "If you have not already heard an Italian military band at its best, you

ought to go. Besides, the National Park is one of the show places of Naples."

Mrs. Talmadge was eager to go, and she rose to fetch her daughter. Before she had taken a step forward, Mr. Sherwood's restraining hand rested upon her arm.

"Why trouble yourself to go after Ella," he said with a twinkle in his eyes. "Come, let us walk on slowly. My son Russel will deem it a pleasure to bring your daughter."

The young man was on his feet instantly.

His fear that Mrs. Talmadge might object to his calling for her daughter in the music room, was dispelled, when his father took her hand and drew it through his arm.

Together they walked off slowly. Russel turned and walked rapidly toward the hotel, his heart beating noisily with happy anticipations.

Count Ravaignac was left alone. An evil smile crossed his face as he saw Russel Sherwood go to find Ella Talmadge. He waited for another fifteen minutes, then he rose and walked away.

When Russel entered the music room, Ella Talmadge was playing Chopin's funeral march. The young girl looked up quickly when he entered.

"Mr. Sherwood," she said in a surprised tone. "I can see it in your face, mama has sent you for me."

"Your guess is correct," he replied with a bow. "I have come to fetch you. Our parents have gone to the National Park to hear the concert, and I was commissioned to come here and fetch you. Will you come?"

There was a mischievous smile lurking about his sensitive mouth as he spoke.

Ella Talmadge looked a trifle embarrassed as her somewhat carelessly arranged dressing gown was re-

flected in the mirror.

"If you will give me a few minutes to dress, I shall be glad to go with you," she said coyly as she disappeared behind the heavy red portiers.

Russel stepped through the open window upon the veranda which surrounded the building. He lit a cigar and allowed his eyes to rest upon the beautiful scenery in the distance.

He stood there completely lost in thought. He did not know Ella was standing at his side, and that she was looking up at him with a sad expression on her lovely face.

Their eyes met a moment later.

"You do not look very happy, Miss Talmadge," he ventured to say. "Perhaps you would rather not go to the concert?"

"Yes, we must," she answered quickly. "Mother would be alarmed if we did not come."

She tried to smile as she spoke, but made a miserable failure of it.

"Will you not tell me what makes you so sad?" he asked coaxingly. "You are not the same girl, Miss Talmadge."

"Why should I weary you by telling you my troubles?" the young girl quivered. "Come, let us go at once."

"No, not until ou tell me what has happened to bring about this change in you," he persisted.

Ella's face had turned crimson. She was fighting desperately to keep back the tears.

"Count Ravaignac has asked for my hand, and mother insists that I should marry him," she faltered at last. "I—I cannot accept him, because—because I do not love him."

Russel Sherwood's heart threatened to burst with

joy as he listened to her faltering words.

His eyes looked into hers with an expression that could not be misunderstood.

Suddenly Ella saw his face turn a trifle pale, as he looked past her at something which had attracted his attention.

She followed his gaze, and to her consternation, she noticed that the red portiers were still moving.

Someone had evidently drawn them apart, then allowed them to fall swiftly. Both had seen it from their position on the veranda.

Russel put his finger to his lips with a sign of warning. He tip-toed back into the music room toward the portiers which divided the music room from the private apartment of the Talmadges.

After peeping through a small opening he started back with a gasp of horror.

Ella had come forward also and looked through the extremely small aperture. Her face had suddenly gone very white.

There, before them on his knees, was Count Ravaignac.

He had a bunch of keys in his hand, and was trying to open a large trunk which contained Mrs. Talmadge's and Ella's jewels.

They watched him breathlessly for a few minutes. The French count had at last succeeded in opening the trunk.

With lightning swiftness he emptied it of its contents until he came to a small wooden box.

It was the work of an instant to pry it open, and the coveted jewels were in his possession.

He rose quickly while stuffing them into his pockets and advanced toward the door leading to the corridor.

Like a flash Russel Sherwood was upon him.

"You scoundrel!" he thundered, "so that is your profession." He held him in a vise-like grip, while Ella ran out of the room and called for help.

The next moment the hotel proprietor appeared followed by a number of excited people among whom was a burly policeman.

"Take this man into custody," Russel shouted. "He is a thief. His pockets are bulging with loot."

The officer took the guilty culprit in charge, while the hotel proprietor and Russel Sherwood held a hurried consultation. While they were thus engaged, Mrs. Talmadge entered with Russel's father.

Ella flashed her mother a triumphant glance. Not a word escaped her tightly compressed lips. Not until the thief had been led away did she utter a sound.

Mrs. Talmadge asked her daughter innumerable questions, which she answered readily. With a grateful smile Mrs. Talmadge gave Russel her hand.

"I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Sherwood," she said in a trembling voice. "It seems that you are destined to be our constant guard."

Russel Sherwood's face flushed with pleasure.

"I am only too glad to be of service to you, Mrs. Talmadge," he answered, his eyes resting on Ella's smiling face.

A few minutes later the Sherwoods and the Talmadges were seated together in the dining room of the hotel.

It seemed that the exciting experience had whetted their appetites, and it was Russel's father who played the host.

And there was a reason for this. Mrs. Talmadge was still amazingly good-looking for her forty-three years. And she had more pep and enthusiasm than many

a girl still in the twenties.

Mr. Sherwood saw in her an ideal companion. For she had all the womanly qualities he admired so much.

There was no reason in the world why he should not marry her, provided, of course, that Mrs. Talmadge could respond to his already strong affection for her.

Chapter 306

ALICE MORTIMER

ON THE broad esplanade, overlooking the picturesque bay of Naples, Russel Sherwood was walking restlessly up and down. From time to time he took out his watch and glanced very eagerly in the one direction.

Alice was in Naples. Immediately upon her arrival she had sent him a letter asking him to meet her alone. The hour of what was to be their last meeting was at hand, but for some reason Alice was tardy.

At last he saw her familiar figure as she left a taxi some little distance away. She came toward him with outstretched hands.

"Russel—Russel!" she cried, her eyes sparkling. "I am glad to see you again."

He took her hand rather indifferently.

Her disappointment was plainly depicted in her beautiful face.

Coming a step closer and looking longingly into his eyes, she continued in a pleading tone:

"Tell me, Russel, are you not glad to see me?"

"Of course I am," he answered, forcing a smile. "Your sudden arrival in Naples came as a complete surprise. How is it that you came without your husband?"

Alice told him all that had happened since he left Philadelphia, and that her husband had left her and was seeking a divorce.

"Think what that means to us," she cried joyfully. "I will be yours—wholly yours. There will be no dividing shadow between us."

For over an hour they walked slowly up and down the esplanade, engaged in an earnest conversation concerning their future.

Alice's charms were doing deadly execution. Russel Sherwood, remembering his promise to her, at last agreed to marry her, providing he would gain the consent of his father.

Alice was rather disappointed at this. It was agreed that they would meet again the following day, and the date of their wedding was to be set at once.

Russel left at once and reached the hotel some minutes later. He was informed that his father had inquired for him a number of times.

With his heart beating noisily, he went up to his private apartment, where he found his parent awaiting him.

"Hello, my boy," the elder Sherwood cried jovially. "Where have you been? Why, what is the matter, you look frightfully pale."

"Father, I have a confession to make," the young man began eagerly, "and I have come to you for advice."

Russel took a seat and then told of his meeting with Alice and his desire to marry her.

He related how he had fallen desperately in love with her the day they met at New Orleans, and also how he had met her on several occasions alone.

With his face averted he told of the incident in the little summer house, and ended his story by announcing that since Robert Ames was divorcing his wife, he was ready and willing to fulfill his promise and marry her.

The elder Sherwood listened with growing astonishment. He could scarcely believe his ears.

"Tell me one thing, Russel," he said at last, "do

you really love this woman whom you wish to make your wife?"

"She is alone and friendless, father," the young man replied. "I am guilty of having dragged her down to her present inenviable position. It was because of my cowardly conduct that her husband cast her out into the street after that fatal night. I know my duty."

Russel's father rose and took a few turns up and down the room. He lit a cigar and resumed his seat. His face was inscrutable as he said:

"The stand you take in this matter does you credit, my boy. Would you trust your future into the hands of a woman whose hands are steeped in human blood?"

"Father!"

Russel had started to his feet with the cry that came from a tortured soul.

"You don't know what you are saying," he said

"Come and sit beside me, Russel," the father entreated him. "If after I have told you my story, you are still willing to marry this base, designing creature, I will offer no further objections."

The young man dropped upon the chair beside his father, his heart beating frantically.

"There are a few facts which I have withheld from you, my boy," the elder Sherwood began. "All of them concern this Mrs. Ames. You recall the first time you and I met her. It was at New Orleans during the racing season. The impression she made on me was extremely unfavorable.

"She reminded me of a beautiful purring tigress. But since she was the wife of Robert Ames, I decided to give her the benefit of my doubt.

"I knew that she was trying to draw you into her net. No respectable married woman lays herself open

to the advances of another man. My suspicion about her caused me to make a quiet investigation. I learned some ugly things about her past.

"She came from Chicago where she had been the wife of a Phillip Gordon. She was, in fact, his second wife. The first Mrs. Gordon, believed dead, turned up unexpectedly.

"She was employed as a governess to her own children, whom she took to Miami Florida. Alice followed her and tried to murder her by sending a box of poisoned candy.

"While in Miami, Alice had among her very intimate men friends a George Balard. The man was in love with her. When she fled to Venice, Ballard followed her.

"As Alice Procter, this woman managed to worm herself into the good graces of the Ames family, who had come to spend a month at that wonderful Italian city. Here is where Robert Ames met her. Why he married her is not clear to me, but that very thing happened in Philadelphia a few weeks later.

"George Ballard had disappeared without leaving a trace. Quite accidentally I ran across a taxi driver in Venice, who told me that he had driven a beautiful woman, heavily veiled, and a man whom she called "George" into the mountains. They wanted to visit Suicide Cliff.

"Some distance away from this spot, he waited for them, but only the woman returned. This led me to believe, and still believe, that Alice caused him to fall off the cliff into the sea, hoping that he would drown. But nothing of the kind happened.

"He was picked up by a fisherman and was taken to a hospital. I have the positive proof that George Ballard received treatment at the Good Samaritan Hospital.

His recovery was quick.

"He followed Alice to America. He turned up one day at the Ames villa as Earl Cortland. She recognized him immediately, but for some reason refused to resume the old relations.

"Finally he threatened to expose her unless she did his bidding. Then Cortland was shot. There is not the least doubt in my mind, but what it was her finger that pulled the trigger. Cortland died a few days later."

Young Russel Sherwood was utterly overcome. With a despairing gesture he threw himself into his father's arms and wept bitterly.

His heart was being torn by conflicting emotions.

"Oh, God!" he moaned, "I never want to see her face again. I shall write a letter and tell her that all is over between us."

"You may spare yourself that trouble, my boy," his father protested. "I shall call upon her this very day and force the truth from her own lips. If there is any justice to be had in this country, Alice Ames shall be tried for the murder of Earl Cortland."

When a few moments later Mr. Sherwood left his apartment he saw a dark shadow disappear in the corridor. It was a woman dressed in black.

As he made his way from the hotel, he never dreamed that Alice had followed his son to the very door of the room and had overheard every word that had passed between them.

She hurried away with her face ghastly white. The end of her career had come at last.

When she arrived at her hotel she informed her maid that she did not wish to be disturbed under any circumstances.

All that night she sat at the table and wrote. The determined expression of her hollow eyes told the fact

that she had arrived at a frightful conclusion. There was only one thing left for her—instant flight.

Rather than face a trial and a long prison term, she would die.

When the gray dawn of the morning crept upon her, Alice was still writing. Several letters lay finished upon the table. The last one was addressed to her husband.

Overwhelmed by remorse, she wanted to right the wrong she had done, as far as it lay in her power.

She had written to the prison officials at the Harrisburg penitentiary, acknowledging her guilt. She admitted that she had fired the shot which killed Earl Cortland, and asked that Larry Coleman be released at once.

Another letter was addressed to the private sanitarium where Cora Allen was confined. She did not spare herself in the least.

At last she rose wearily and changed her clothing. Without tasting any food, she made her way from the hotel.

She stopped at the desk long enough to pay her bill, and told the hotel clerk that she would send for her luggage later in the day.

She was apparently cool and collected. There was nothing in her general appearance to betray her terrible emotion nor the purpose in her mind.

With a slightly faltering step she reached the sidewalk and entered a cab.

Her voice was calm and perfectly natural as she asked the driver to take her toward the distant high mountain.

Alice did not stop for breath until she had reached the highest pinnacle. There she sank upon the cold ground and buried her face in her hands for a few min-

utes.

Alice's determination to end it all had driven her far indeed. A few feet away was the fateful precipice. In a moment it would be all over.

But women of her type rarely commit suicide. Their great self-love forbids. Moreover, they are afraid to die. Alice was no exception. In fact she dreaded death with every fibre of her being. Her very heart and soul rebelled against it.

As she sat there, trying to come to some kind of a decision, a tremendous wave of self-pity swept over her.

"You are a fool if you take your own life," an inner voice whispered to her. "You are too beautiful to even think of it. You can go to some other country and begin a new life. Men will love you no matter where you go."

And then her vanity began to do its work. Forgotton was her remorse. Forgotten was her intention of ending it all.

The expression of her face changed with her thoughts. She darted a swift glance in every direction, then she rose. The taxi which had brought her, was gone. For she had told the driver not to wait. The man had looked at her strangely as if he suspected that she had come to Suicide Cliff to take her own life.

"He'll spread the story—I hope he will," she muttered to herself. "And that will make it easier for me. They will believe me dead and the police won't search any longer."

Alice hid among the rocks until evening came. It was a long walk back to the city, but she was not afraid.

And as she walked on steadily, she formed a definite plan for the future. Fortunately she was well supplied with ready cash. She had jewelry that would bring her a fortune in case she was forced to sell.

It was not yet late when she reached the city. At a small millinery shop she brought a close-fitting hat with a heavy veil. This hid her face as she proceeded to carry out her plan.

At a small hotel she registered as: "Alice Mortimer." And under that name she boarded a steamer bound for Southampton, England, the following day. During the trip she remained in her stateroom most of the time. She was not going to take any chances.

But the ship's captain sought her out. His obvious desire to please "Miss Mortimer," reawakened her courage. She told him blandly that she was an Englishwoman, and he believed her.

Most men readily believe a beautiful woman.

Through the captain she met Graham Ericsen, an unusually handsome young Englishman, and heir to vast wealth. He told her about everything she was anxious to know.

He fell in love with Alice at first sight. Within three days he proposed marriage to her.

"Of course, we shall have to keep it secret for a while until I can win my uncle over," he told her. "He is a peculiar old chap."

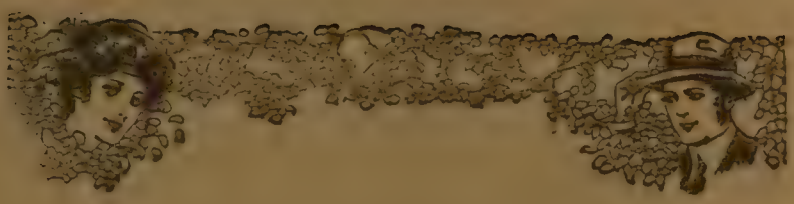
Alice shook her head.

"I could not think of you jeopardizing your chances of inheriting your uncle's estate," she answered in a rather business-like way. "We better wait until you get his consent to our marriage."

But that was a different question, for Graham Ericson's uncle had some ideas of his own along that line.

The couple planned as young couples will. And so it happened that "Alice Mortimer," as she now called herself, upon her arrival in England, went to live with a widow in the village of Earl's Monkton.

And it is of peculiar significance that this village was not a great distance from "The Croft," the immense Ericsen estate.



Chapter 307

UNITED AT LAST

ROBERT AMES had left the villa with the avowed intention of leaving the country. His luggage had been taken to the Pennsylvania station, where he was waiting eagerly for the train that was to take him westward.

One of his oldest friends was living in Mexico, where he had large interests in the oil industry. He meant to start life anew far away from home.

Having purchased a through ticket for El Paso, Texas, he expected to reach Mexico City in a week, and there begin a new career.

He wanted to forget his unhappy past and all its heartaches and misery.

The fact that he had lost his fortune did not seem to dampen his spirit.

When he reached Chicago, he had lost some of his eagerness to reach the scene of his new activities. There was something holding him back.

One night, while he lay awake in his berth, the distant wail of a child came to him through the rumbling noise of the train.

It awoke within his soul the love of a parent.

Somewhere back in Philadelphia a fatherless little child was perhaps crying this moment. The thought struck him forcefully.

With the wail of that child came a vision of a sweet angelic face.

A pair of soft blue eyes he could never forget, seemed to be looking into his own with reproach.

"You are fleeing from your duty," a voice seemed to whisper into his ears. "You are deserting the field of battle like a coward."

For several days he lingered in Chicago undecided what to do. He had written a letter to his attorney, R. A. Chatfield The answer came quickly, and he was informed that some very important letters were awaiting him at his office.

The letter closed asking for instructions.

Robert Ames wired immediately for his lawyer to hold those letters and not send them, that he would be back in Philadelphia in two days.

So it happened that when the next train pulled out of the Pennsylvania station for the East, Robert Ames was again homeward bound.

When he arrived in Philadelphia he went at once to the office of the lawyer.

Chatfield had been his classmate at Harvard, and as soon as he was admitted to the bar, Robert Ames had entrusted all legal matters into his care.

He was not only his lawyer and adviser, but also his confidential friend.

They were closeted for several hours. Upon the urgent advice of Chatfield, Robert Ames decided to remain in Philadelphia and await the outcome of his domestic troubles.

First of all he instituted divorce proceedings against his wife Alice. Then he began a systematic and thorough search for Hazel. He still refused to believe that she had married again.

Having graduated from a law school, Robert Ames was competent to enter into actual practice as soon as he was admitted to the bar.

For the present he remained with Chatfield as a silent partner.

He managed all the affairs of the office and also gave legal advice to those who sought it. The name of the firm was changed to that of "Chatfield & Ames, Attorneys at Law."

Robert Ames had passed his examination successfully and was at once admitted to the bar.

Since his coming into the business, the firm began to prosper. The number of their clients grew until they were obliged to enlarge their offices.

This necesitated the hiring of more clerks. Today Robert Ames was seated at his desk completely lost in thought.

Before him on his desk lay an open letter which had just arrived from Italy. It was from Alice.

The tears welled up in his eyes as he read it again and again. The letter contained the folowing words:

Dear Robert:

Perhaps you will deny me the right to call you that, but you will not object when I tell you that it will be the last time. When this letter reaches you, I shall have gone to the great beyond.

It would be needless to go into all the details and tell you how I came to flee from America to Italy. Suffice it to say that I could no longer hide from human eyes the many crimes of my miserable life.

I was forced to leave rather suddenly, because the detectives were on my trail. I came to Italy to make one more effort to find happiness — I should have said forgetfulness.

True happiness only comes to those who are not cursed with a guilty conscience.

There can be no peace of mind for me in this world, so I must seek it in death. To be quite frank, I will admit that the prospect of a prison cell drove me to my last act.

I have written to the authorities and asked that Larry Coleman be set free. If you wish to do a kind act prevail upon him to keep his marriage vow to Cora Allen.

The Ames estate will naturally revert to you after my death, and my last prayer is that you will be happy with the woman who deserved your love. Go and find her. She still loves you with all her heart and soul.

I can scarcely expect you to forgive me after all the misery I have caused you, yet I ask it, as you some day hope to be forgiven.

Good-bye forever!

Alice.

For almost an hour Robert Ames sat in the same position without moving. The terrible news had overwhelmed him.

Robert Ames remained in his law office, his heart filled with gloom. He had very little pleasure to look forward to.

For the past two weeks several detectives in his employ had made every effort to find a trace of Hazel.

Their reports were always the same.

When they had found a clue and followed it up, it usually developed that it was some other woman who closely resembled the description of Hazel.

The repeated failures of the detectives to find any real clue to the whereabouts of Hazel had a depressing effect upon Robert Ames.

A number of successive disappointment were responsible for the low ebb of his spirits.

To day he was seated at his desk looking over the mail. At the request of his law partner, Chatfield, he was to find another clerk for their office.

With the constantly increasing business work accumulated also and hundreds of letters lay about unfiled.

Some of their correspondence was being neglected because neither of them had the time to attend to it.

So they decided to employ a young woman to assist them in their general work.

Robert Ames was in a quandary. He did not wish to advertise and have the office besieged all day with applicants.

He was gazing helplessly about, when his glance fell upon a small drawer in his desk, which bore the label, "Applications."

This solved the problem. Why not send a letter to one of the addresses in that list of applications and ask her to call?

This would spare him the unpleasant task of interviewing applicants all day long.

He was idly looking over a number of names, when suddenly he stared hard.

His face turned strangely white as he read:

Miss Hazel Wynne, application for general office clerk. Address, 1 Brinton Street.

With a low cry he jumped to his feet. His heart was beating way up in his throat. Again and again he looked and read the name over and over.

Yes, it was true. There it stood black on white.

He turned swiftly and called the head clerk.

"Is this your handwriting, Jergens?" he asked as he pointed at the name. His voice was strangely unlike his own.

"Yes, sir," the head clerk answered promptly.

"Could you give me a description of the young lady?" Robert Ames continued, with his lips quivering.

"I think I can. Let me see," the young man replied, scratching his head for a few moments. "Ah, yes, I have it," he cried suddenly, "this young lady came the day you advertised for a general office clerk. I remember her very well

"She was a very beautiful young woman with blue eyes and golden hair. I thought she looked a trifle sad. I shall never forget her bitter smile when I told her that the position had already been filled."

Robert Ames scarcely waited until the clerk had finished. He seized his hat and coat and ran from the office like a man possessed.

The name and address was constantly dancing before his eyes as he reached the street an instant later.

He had little trouble in finding the street, which was not a great distance from lower Market Street.

At last he stood in front of the house, panting. His eager knock on the door was answered by Mrs. Kingsley, who looked surprised when he asked in a breathless voice to see Miss Hazel Wynne.

He was ushered into the little parlor. He was too nervous to sit down; he paced the floor in his feverish excitement.

At last the door opened. A low musical voice said:

"Did you wish to see me, sir?"

Continued in next number

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